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LAKE ZURICH -- Public opposition to the proposed Canadian National Railway purchase of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern line went into overtime Monday night as area residents lined up at Lake Zurich High School to pitch their cases to the federal government.

Though official public comment on the proposed sale was scheduled to end on Feb. 1, the deadline was pushed back to Feb. 15, giving both individuals and municipalities a chance to file their input with the U.S. Department of Transportation's Surface Transportation Board.

With more than 300 people filing into the school's performing arts building, U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean, D-Barrington, led a group of officials onstage to state their opposition to the concept of Canadian National taking over the EJ&E line, which reportedly would add between 15 and 26 more trains per day on the Waukegan-to-Gary route.

"Living right by Lake-Cook and Ela (roads), I can't go to the store, I can't go to the post office, I can't pick up my kids without crossing the EJ&E, so this one is near and dear to my heart," Bean told the crowd. "I find myself going over those tracks and wondering, 'How long would I be sitting here?'"

State Rep. Ed Sullivan Jr., encouraged those in attendance to provide testimony along those same lines.

"I'm all for pro-business, but at what cost?" said Sullivan, making reference to Mundelein's ongoing attempt to sue Canadian National for blocking rail crossings. "You guys are going to have to tell us what the costs are -- going to the store, going to the emergency room ... We can't have trains blocking our roads."

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk said public input has "had a visible impact" on federal transportation matters before, such as the Federal Railroad Administration's decision in 2005 to allow

communities to set up safety equipment and ban train whistles in designated "quiet zones."

"Almost all of the comments that the board received were from Illinois," Kirk said, adding that sentiment against the EJ&E sale is "a very strong state, local, federal and bipartisan issue."

Among the officials expressing their community's formal opposition to the proposal were Round Lake Mayor Bill Gentes, Deer Park Village President Scott Gifford, Hawthorn Woods Village President Keith Hunt and Long Grove Village President Maria Rodriguez.

Detailing his opposition, North Barrington Village President Bruce Sauer told the crowd that "the Canadian government has devoted over a billion dollars to improving its rail (infrastructure) ... This is all about a freight superhighway that would go right through our backyards."

"It would have a devastating effect on Barrington," said Tower Lakes Village President Kathleen M. Leitner, adding that the area is "one of the economic centers" of northern Illinois.

The Surface Transportation Board previously fielded testimony in January at public hearings in Mundelein and Barrington, along with other EJ&E communities like West Chicago and Gary, Ind.

Once the public comments have been compiled, they will be weighed during the drafting of an environmental impact report, which could take up to a year to complete. A final decision on the purchase proposal has been estimated at up to two years away.

This article was edited to comply with Franking Commission Guidelines